



The River Review

SPOKANE, WASHINGTON ★ JULY 13-18, 2009

Presented by the Paralyzed Veterans of America and the Department of Veterans Affairs

Photo Courtesy of Spokane Regional CVB/Alan Bisson

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2009 Spirit of the Games Winner

George Norton

The feeling is palpable the moment you roll off the plane. It's in the air, and it's on the faces of the Patriot Riders as they salute buses full of wheelchair athletes driving by. It's an excitement we all feel just by being here. All week, the city of Spokane has been alive with a charge that feels like electricity coursing through your veins, flowing between you and everyone you encounter.

That charge is the true Spirit of the Games. Each year, one dynamic athlete is chosen as a representative of that feeling and this year that honor belongs to combat-wounded Vietnam Veteran, George Norton, of Fairhaven, Mass.

Norton describes it best by saying, "You have to see it to believe it. You have to feel it to understand it. It truly touches your heart and changes you forever."

Norton has participated in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games for 21 years, since they were held in San Antonio, Texas, in 1988. He was no stranger to wheelchair sports before he came to the Games, having played wheelchair basketball for the New England PVA (NEPVA) team two years prior, but he wasn't on a basketball court when he experienced something that would change his life forever.

"I wandered off on my own and went to watch the swimming event when I saw a quad athlete swimming just by moving his head," said Norton. "Someone told me that guy was the Michael Jordan of his event with his range of abilities. From that point on, I knew I would come every year because I was inspired by what all of these guys could do."

Just like he said he would, Norton has competed in the Games every year since and says he will continue until he can't anymore.

Eileen Craffey, his coach and friend, describes him as, "a true 'roll' model for all who meet him. He's a gentleman who always takes the time to talk to others and help them when they need it."

Norton says that he wasn't always always that way. He joined the Army excited to serve his country and follow in the footsteps of his father and brother. His father served in WWII and his brother was in the Korean War. From 1966-67, Norton served his country in Vietnam. On December 20, 1966 he was on a reconnaissance mission in a swift boat when he was shot in his left leg. After a year of trying to save his limb, it was finally amputated.

Norton, who was always an athlete, said it was hard to swallow knowing that he wouldn't be able to play baseball or spend his life in the service. When he was introduced to wheelchair basketball a number of years later, his life changed forever.

Playing basketball and coming to the Games gave Norton a new outlook on life, and now he is able to share that with younger athletes.

"I love seeing all the young guys develop," said Norton. "I love teaching them. I tell them that at first it will be hard, but if you keep up with your sport it will change your life forever."



George Norton enters the Spokane Veterans Memorial Arena at the Opening Ceremonies on Monday evening. Norton, a native of Fairhaven, Mass., is the 2009 Spirit of the Games winner.

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In a nomination letter, his friend and fellow athlete James Milliken wrote, “George is a great competitor and really enjoys the Games. He really helps the younger athletes, and is always giving them tips and suggestions to help them improve their game.

Norton’s role as a mentor doesn’t stop when he gets home. As a member of the “What’s It Like Program,” in his hometown of Boston, he goes to different schools to educate children about being in a wheelchair.

“We set up cones and get the children in wheelchairs to do the course,” said Norton. “Then we let them shoot basketballs normally, and then we let them try from the chair. It’s very fulfilling and enjoyable to see how their perception changes afterward.”

As much as he loves teaching others, he also thrives on competition. Norton, who has collected hundreds of medals in his years competing, won gold in table tennis this week, and won silver in basketball, with softball still to take place at press time.

When he returns home he will continue to compete with the NEPVA Celtics wheelchair basketball team, and the Rolling Red Sox wheelchair softball team.

Each year, the Spirit of the Games award is given to an athlete who clearly demonstrates not only athletic competence, but also sportsmanship and strength of character. Norton has earned the award by showing all of these qualities and being the example to follow on and off the court.

When asked what the games mean to him he said, “There are no words to describe it. It’s with you all year long. It’s about seeing everybody, sharing stories and hoping everyone stays healthy. It’s about having a love for the people. The Games are bigger than all of us and waiting for next year is what helps keep everyone going strong.”



George Norton takes aim during the basketball competition at the 2009 National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

Past Spirit of the Games Recipients:

Year	Name	Hometown
2008	*Gustave “Gus” Sorenson	Sturtevant, Wis.
2007	*Philemon “Joe” Valesquez	Turlock, Calif.
2006	*Charles Allen	Cedar Hill, Texas
2005	*Orlando Perez	Augusta, Ga.
2004	*Gary Pearson	Seattle, Wash.
2003	*Wayne Miller	Silver Spring, Md.
2002	Ken Medieros	Taunton, Mass.
2001	*Laura Schwanger	Elkins Park, Pa.
2000	Larry Hughes	Columbia, Md.
1999	† Ken Huber	Milan, Mich.
1998	Gil Garcia	San Antonio, Texas
1997	Robert (“Pat”) Sapp	Rockwall, Texas
1996	*Holly Koester	Berea, Ohio
1995	*Penny Gillett	Fresno, Calif.
	*James Torres	Caguas, P.R.
1994	*Tim Davis	Paso Robles, Calif.
1993	Hope Cooper	San Antonio, Texas
1992	Kater Cornwell	Charlotte, N.C.
1991	† Max Rhodes	Miami, Fla.
1990	*Mike Trujillo	Huntington Beach, Calif.
1989	*Jim Martinson	Puyallup, Wash.
1988	† Ken Wright	Palo Alto, Calif.
1987	Russ Monroe	Davison, Mich.

* Present at the 2009 Games

† Veteran has passed away



Thank You Spokane!

On behalf of the athletes and their families, the coaches, officials, special guests, staff and volunteers, our sincerest gratitude goes to the local organizing committee from Spokane. The committee members from the Spokane VA Medical Center and the Northwest Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America devoted almost two years of tedious planning and continuous dedication to ensure that this week’s Games were a success. From the delighted response received by athletes and their families during the competitive events and festivities, all of the long hours and attention to detail has clearly paid off.

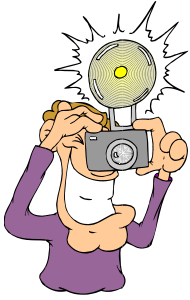
This week offered everyone involved a multitude of thrilling competitions and entertaining special events, including the Kick-off, Opening Ceremonies, Kid’s Day and the ever-popular team sporting events. The addition of the block party and the golf clinic added other elements to this year’s Games.

Our local hosts have graciously welcomed each and every one of us to experience how much fun *Roll’n on the River* in Spokane can be. The enormous success of the 29th National Veterans Wheelchair Games would not have been possible without their continued commitment.

We will take with us not only the special memories from the competitions, but also the feeling of kinship that we get from seeing old friends and making new ones. It is the experiences we get from the Games that make this event so special and bring us back year after year. Thank you, Spokane, for making this year’s experience a truly memorable one for us all.



Thanks from the Public Affairs and Photo Team



As we close out this exciting week in Spokane, the members of our Public Affairs and Photography Team want to thank all of the athletes and their families for supporting our efforts here at the Games. We sincerely appreciate your willingness to allow us to tell your inspiring stories in our daily newsletter, on the Games Web site, in your hometown news releases and to media outlets all across the country. Past experience has proven that by doing this, you will inspire countless other Veterans in our communities who will make a life changing decision to join us at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Denver next year.

As always, your courage and your athletic skills have dazzled all of us as well – both professionally and personally. In fact, no member of this local and national team will leave the Games unaffected. Thank you for showing us your determination and strength of spirit on the slalom course; your concentration and focus at air guns and archery; your sheer fortitude at swimming and weightlifting; your sportsmanship at basketball, power soccer, softball and quad rugby; and your steadfast resolve to succeed at every other event and activity this past week. In addition to the medals you have picked up along the way, you have also shown us a lot about mentoring and coaching other athletes, about team spirit, and you have clearly demonstrated how the joy of competition never fades, even after a serious injury. As so many of you have told us, “It’s all about ability, not disability.” The strong feeling of camaraderie, though, continues to equal the benefits of competition for a large number of our athletes.

As we all depart from our hotels and get on the airplanes tomorrow, remember the very special week we enjoyed here together, on our shared journey of “Roll’n on the River.” Next winter, on one of those gray (and possibly snowy) days when you’re getting cabin fever from being inside, or perhaps just feeling down from the long lack of sunshine, remember the past week in Spokane and put in your DVD from the Closing Ceremonies. It is sure to bring it all back to you – and you just won’t be able to keep from smiling as you remember... Safe travels home, everybody!

The 29th National Veterans Wheelchair Games Public Affairs Team



Photo Courtesy of the Denver Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau / Ron Ruhoff

Our Shot:

Denver is thrilled to host the 30th National Veterans Wheelchair Games next summer, and we’re planning an event like none before. Come see what makes Denver one of the most exciting destination cities in the nation. Denver is the sports-focused home to eight professional sports teams, and games are often sold out. You haven’t seen fans until you’ve been to Denver, and they can’t wait to see YOU at the 2010 National Veterans Wheelchair Games!

Straight Shot:

The new Hyatt Regency will serve as next year’s hotel for athletes. It has more than 1,200 rooms and is right across the street from the Convention Center. The Colorado Convention Center is the third largest in the nation and host to a number of dynamic events and conventions.

A Shot Of Sun:

During July, Denver’s average lows are 55 degrees, the highs are around 88, and rainfall averages 1.7 inches. Beautiful sports weather!

A Shot Of Green:

The 2010 Games will be the first green Games, with a focus on hosting an environmentally friendly event. There are more than 4,000 acres of traditional parks and pathways, encompassing 2,500 natural acres. Events such as handcycling, track, field and many ceremonies will take place in Denver’s beautiful parks.

Glamour Shot:

Under the guidance of Denver fashionistas Joy Weyna-King and Denise Hines, the memorabilia committee will immortalize the 30th Games with some awesome clothes and souvenirs. Check out the latest fashion trends, straight from the runway in Milan to the Mountain States PVA Web site: www.msctpva.org. We know you can hardly wait ... order your t-shirt now!

Mark your calendars for July 4 – 9, 2010. It’s a date – come spend a mile high Fourth of July!

*Experience the rush ...
Honor their service ...
Share the pride ...
Games with Heart....A Mile High!*

Saturday Night Transportation

A cartoon yellow airplane with a smiling face, wearing goggles, and having a red stripe on its side. It is flying towards the left.

Lost and Found

- If you realize you are missing something when you get home, please get in touch with Barbara Carrara at the Spokane VA Medical Center at barbara.carrara@va.gov, or call 509 434-7658. Please include a brief description of the item.

Medical suites will close tonight at 10:30 p.m.

If an athlete has a medical emergency, call the hotel operator and they will communicate with the physician on-call.

In the case of a life-threatening emergency, please have the hotel operator call 911.

Wheelchair Repair

Wheelchair repair will be present at the airport at departure times.
If you need emergency wheelchair repair, call (509) 993-6242.

Durable Medical Equipment (DME) Return

How easy can we make this for you? Just leave it in your hotel room! We've already made arrangements to come by and pick it up after you've checked out. Just make sure that the room you're leaving it in is the same room you filled out on the sheet when you signed for your equipment.

Before You Depart...

Please make sure that you turn in the debit cards you've been using for your meals. Drop-off boxes will be available at the Closing Banquet.

Share Your Memories from the Games

Don't forget the Snapfish site to view, upload or download photos from the Games for free. Go to <http://www.snapfish.com/nationalwheelchairgames>. Sign up as a new user and get 50 free 4" x 6" prints. Additional prints are available for 9¢ each. *Snapfish is also posting photos of individual award recipients on the Web site.*



Sunday
Partly Cloudy
High 88°
Low 54°

Cartoon of the Day

